

Remember the story about the small boy who announced to a kingdom of sycophants what everyone already knew: that the emperor had no clothes?

Sometimes it takes an election to announce to lawmakers what every ordinary American already knows: our country is broke and the way we do business is broken. Even now, some Washington elites are eager to go back to the old way of doing things. But that's not why our neighbors sent us to the House of Representatives.

James Madison famously argued: "If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary."

Madison demanded a system where government was obliged to control itself. That's why Congress is divided into the House and the Senate and why we have three branches of government. Yet he was skeptical that these "checks and balances" would be enough to protect public liberty and suggested that "further precautions" might be necessary to control government.

History has proven him right.

The Appropriations Committee funds numerous federal programs long after their authorizations have expired. In fiscal year 2010 alone, Congress appropriated \$290 billion to programs with expired authorizations. It produces appropriations bills that combine spending of unrelated agencies and programs, such as suburban highways and urban affordable housing. These measures pass on the House floor, not because of their merits, but because no legislator wants to vote against the funds for his or her own district. Consequently, the power of the purse is concentrated among just a few senior Members.

Clearly, it's time for reform.

Too often Washington makes the rules and then makes itself the exception to the rules. Both political parties have suppressed debate on legislation that dealt with uncomfortable issues, made rules and then ignored them, and overspent your money. Games of power and control are normal on Capitol Hill – and real reform will be uncomfortable for those who benefit from these games.

This week, during a meeting of the Republican Conference for the House of Representatives, I started an ongoing discussion with my colleagues on how to reform the House of Representatives and obtained a public commitment from leadership to work on a systematic redesign of the House. We must take a hard look at the *budgeting process*: requiring the House to vote on a balanced budget and making it harder to pass credit limit increases and new spending. I also believe that we must reform the way *committee jurisdiction* is set up, so that spending decisions are spread across committees, with checks and balances to ensure that unrelated measures are voted on separately. We need to ensure greater *transparency* in the legislative process, by requiring legislation to be publicly available at least 72 hours before it is scheduled for a vote on the floor.

The founders believed the House of Representatives would be the People's House; filled with elected representatives who were close to their communities and understood their interests. It's time for structural reforms that restore that vision. If we are to be successful in fundamentally changing the way Washington does business, we must take "further precautions" to ensure that we do not waste this opportunity.

Making the changes Americans demand will not be easy. The majority party is going to have to decentralize power, increase transparency, restructure committees and tackle the budget deficit. In the short-run, these adjustments may be difficult for the majority party, but they will be right for America.

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Editorial by Congressman Todd Akin originally published on [The Record Blog](#), December 9, 2010.

